



EXHIBIT 7
DATE 2-6-15
HB 313

RE: HB 313

Vote: YES

Name: Susan Plath, Grant Writer, Billings Public Schools

I am writing to ask you to vote YES on HB313.

Billings Public Schools enrolls 10% of the state's students housed in 22 elementary schools, 4 (soon to be 6) middle schools, 3 high schools, a Career Center, administration offices that also house students and classes, a facilities building and a warehouse (33 buildings now, 35 buildings in the next two years).

The only mechanism the State of Montana offers school districts for building upgrades, maintenance or new construction is through the use of bonds. I have researched potential private foundations for assistance with our deferred maintenance and new middle school building projects with little success. Of the 25 foundations I have found, only 5 consider projects in Montana. Of those 5, only 2 consider supporting government or public building projects. This greatly limits our ability to secure funds through grant sources.

Since 2010, the Billings community has passed four bonds. In 2010 and 2012 the Billings community passed high school bonds to begin a multi-phased deferred maintenance and facility upgrades to Billings Senior High School as well as other high school deferred maintenance projects. In 2013 the community passed elementary bonds to work on deferred maintenance. In 2014 the community passed a \$122 million elementary bond to work on deferred maintenance and the building of two new middle schools.

The Billings school district submitted a Quality Schools Grant for this biennium. The \$1,533,212 request would allow continued work on Billings Senior High School's HVAC and replace and upgrade lighting.

This HVAC system and lighting project is in the original 1938 building at Senior High School. The project will replace all lighting on the 2nd and 3rd floors with new LED light fixtures. The project includes installation of new ceilings to conceal new overhead ductwork. The ductwork replaces the existing unit ventilator equipment in each classroom in the impacted section of the building.

This project also allows the District to complete the HVAC systems in the teaching spaces on the second and third floors of the original 1938 building. Our classroom teachers in the section of Senior that has NOT had the HVAC renovations say their classrooms become exceptionally hot by each afternoon (80 degrees) – fall, winter, and spring – and they notice students in the afternoon classes are less engaged, more lethargic, and complete less work than their students in the morning classes. Our consulting engineer from Con'eer Engineering states that the existing HVAC has outlived its useful life and that there are no longer parts available to patch the existing HVAC system.

Billings Public Schools received deferred maintenance funding in 2009 and 2010 from the Montana Department of Commerce. We received a \$25,000 planning grant in 2012 to complete a comprehensive Master Facilities Plan. For this we thank you. We have over \$32,000,000 in deferred maintenance just in our high school district alone. Our current request would benefit nearly 1,700 students from our most diverse high school. We ask the Joint Appropriations Committee for Long-Range Planning to fund not only the Billings project but all Quality Schools Grant requests. This funding will help 53 school buildings across Montana. Thank you for your time and consideration.